Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta

SETTING THE DIRECTION MINISTER'S FORUM

Phase 2 Community Consultation | What we Heard Report

Prepared by Calder Bateman Communications for Alberta Education | May 2009

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta is a major Alberta Education project designed to create a new framework that will help students with special needs receive the education they need to be successful. The project is comprehensive and far-reaching, and will consider the needs of students in all types of schools: public, separate, Francophone, charter and private.

Phase 1 of the project reviewed the effectiveness of the current approach and then focused on defining a vision, mission and principles to guide the future direction of special education in Alberta. Phase 2 presented this vision, mission and principles to Albertans and asked them to consider five building blocks that that could herald positive and important change for students with special education needs. These building blocks are:

1. Setting High Expectations for ALL Students.

2. Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming.

3. Building Capacity for School-Based Staff and the Learning Team.

4. Collaborating for Learner Success.

5. Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for the 21st Century.

Participants in the Phase 2 Consultation had an opportunity to assess each of these building blocks, along with a collection of associated ideas, and to ask themselves: Will these proposed changes get Alberta closer to an inclusive education system that will meet the needs of all students?

Over 6,000 voices were heard in Phase 2, including 871 people who participated in a community consultation session, 5,246 people who completed a questionnaire, either individually or as part of a group, and 434 young people who responded to a specially-designed questionnaire for youth.

See Appendix A – Consultation Methods

Teachers represented the largest group of questionnaire respondents, followed by parents in general, parents of students with special education needs, teacher assistants and school administrators. Similarly, teachers represented the largest portion of participants at the community consultation sessions followed by parents of students with special education needs.

For more information, see Appendix B – Survey Respondents and Session Participants by Type

The purpose of this report is to summarize what we heard from Albertans in Phase 2 and to use this input to inform the development of a new framework for special education in Alberta.

WHAT WE HEARD

1. Vision, Mission and Principles

1.1 Agreement with Vision, Mission and Principles

A proposed Vision, Mission and Principles for the Setting the Direction initiative was derived from the Phase 1 consultation and presented to consultation session participants and survey respondents in Phase 2.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that this Vision, Mission and Principles will guide the right kind of change in the education system in Alberta. As shown in Figure 1-1, most respondents (80%) agreed (52%) or strongly agreed (28%) that the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles will guide the right kind of change in the education system. One in five (21%) disagreed (10%) or strongly disagreed (11%) with this statement. Teachers (the largest group of respondents) were more likely to disagree with this statement than were other groups (26% disagreed, including 15% who strongly disagreed).

In general, consultation session participants agreed that the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles would move the education system in the right direction. Some qualified this by saying, "it will IF the framework is aligned with appropriate policy and resources." They said

there must be a long-term and sustainable commitment to actualize this vision. Participants said they were "cautiously optimistic" that this framework would put the province on "the right track" but they were taking a "wait and see position." They said the Vision, Mission and Principles express the "what" but the challenge will be in the "how." Participants wanted clear definitions and details on how this framework will look in practice.

After reviewing the five building blocks, respondents were asked to agree or disagree that these five building blocks are aligned with the Vision, Mission and Principles of one inclusive education system. Again, as shown in Figure 1-2, the vast majority of respondents (89%) agreed (62%) or strongly agreed (27%) with this statement. Just 12% disagreed.

Figure 1-1: Will the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles guide the right kind of change in the education system?

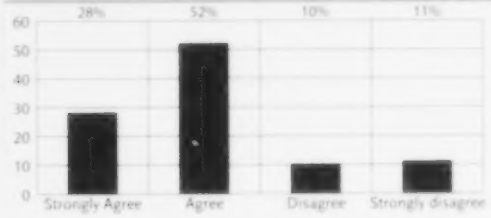
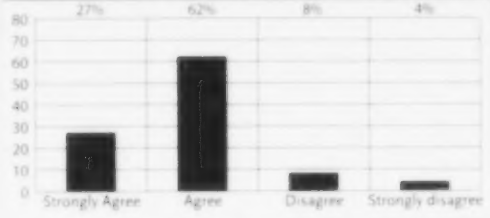


Figure 1-2: Alignment of Building Blocks with Vision, Mission and Principles



1.2 "What We Like"

- **Student Centred**

Consultation session participants liked the student-centred focus of the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles, including the emphasis on ability, individual success and meeting student needs. They liked the positive tone and the expressed belief that all students can learn. They said the Vision, Mission and Principles described a system that is responsive to all students, not only those with special needs.

- **System Focus**

Participants were impressed by the willingness to attempt to redesign the system, rather than simply "tinkering" or making cosmetic changes. They liked the focus on ONE system, with a commitment to system-wide changes to ensure equity. "We want the system to look like this," they told us.

- **Inclusion**

Many participants said they liked the "visionary" definition of inclusion and the recognition that it is not the same as integration. They were pleased to see inclusion described as something that goes beyond the classroom. They told us "inclusion is not about geography or placement. It is an attitude that embraces diversity." They said this definition encourages us to recognize the value of ALL students and that "learning happens for everyone when students with disabilities are effectively included in school life."

- **Diversity**

Participants said they liked the shift from addressing disabilities as a problem, to embracing and celebrating differences. They said the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles communicate respect and acceptance for ALL students, and recognize that children with differences contribute to the learning of others.

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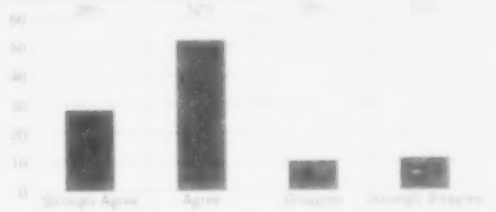

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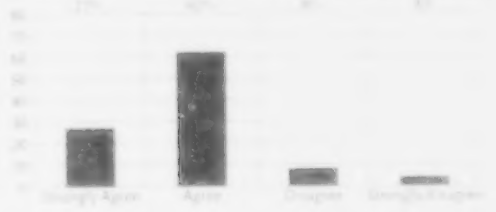

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- **Diversity**

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- **Parent Involvement**

Acknowledgement that parents are an essential part of the learning team was welcomed by many participants. They said parents have a vital role to play in planning and are a key stakeholder. The important role of parents must be much more explicit throughout the new direction, they said, and worded in a way that reflects their role as drivers of the process. They also said many parents will need training and other supports to enable their involvement.

- **Partnership and Collaboration**

The focus on partnership and collaboration was welcomed as positive by consultation session participants. They liked the concept of teamwork and interdepartmental collaboration, which recognized that meeting student needs requires the involvement of a wide group of stakeholders – including students, families, school, community and system.

- **Definitions and Language**

Many consultation session participants expressed concerns about the language used in the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles, and called for clarity and more specific definitions. Without this clarity, they said, there is a greater possibility of "subjective interpretation." Specific words or phrases identified by participants as requiring clarity included inclusive, successful, belonging, "one" system, "best learning opportunities," learner-centred and stakeholders (who are they?). Some did not like the word "assets" and suggested strengths, abilities, talents or gifts as replacements. Others asked "where is the idea of developing student potential, rather than focusing on student success?"

- **Resources**

Consultation session participants asked, "what does appropriately resourced mean and who determines what resources are appropriate?" They were concerned that current resources would simply be spread more thinly, with no new resources to bring about effective and meaningful change. They said sufficient resources need to be available to schools and in the classroom, including time, space, personnel, professional development, health professionals and technology. Many raised concerns about the availability, recruitment and retention of educational assistants and professionals. Francophone participants identified the particular need for francophone specialists, especially in mental health disciplines.

- **Implementation**

While most participants liked the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles, in theory, many expressed concerns about how they would be implemented in practice. They said we have to be careful not to create false hopes or unrealistic expectations. They recognized that the proposed changes would require a significant cultural change across the system and asked, "how do you foster a value of belongingness?" Some were concerned about wholesale change and said "we don't want to lose programs that are currently working." Others said we cannot lose sight of "deficits" completely, saying "we can't forget about what we want them to learn!" In general, they want the transition to be smooth and gradual, taking time to build support and change values across the system.

- **Practical Inclusion**

While most consultation session participants liked the emphasis on inclusion, they said it needs to be approached realistically and with sufficient flexibility. They said there will be "big problems if inclusion isn't understood in the same way by everyone." Some said inclusion is an "old" word that has many connotations, suggesting that we use a different word to express the desire to give each student the best possible learning opportunity.

- **Parent Involvement**

Participants raised a number of issues related to parent involvement. First, they asked "how do we ensure parents feel included, valued and involved as members of the learning team? What supports do parents need to be informed and prepared for this new direction?" At the same time, they said, we need to recognize that while parental involvement is very beneficial, it is not always easy to get. Some participants were concerned that the new direction would "mandate" parental involvement and cautioned that "children should not be penalized by a lack of it." The need for choice in program decisions was also highlighted by some participants, who wanted parents to retain the right to make choices for their children. They said we need to clarify that parents are included in decision making – that they are not just "respected" but actually listened to."

- **Teachers and Classroom**

Many participants expressed concerns about the burden a new direction for special education might place on teachers and the classroom. They were concerned that the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles does not explicitly say the system "values the expertise of teachers." They asked "how will teachers be supported to carry out this mission? Will the teacher have a voice?" Many pointed to the need for ongoing professional development for teachers and asked "where will the time come from?"

- **Accountability**

The issue of accountability was raised in a number of ways by consultation session participants. In general, they asked whether it is measurable and how it will be measured. How will we know that we are achieving this vision? On a practical level, they wanted to know what kind of evaluation tools will be used and what kind of paperwork will be required. They also asked "how will other ministries be included and accountable?"

2. Building Blocks

In Phase 1, Albertans helped to identify a number of elements that should be considered in creating a truly inclusive education system. This advice was combined with that of academic experts and a review of current research to develop five critical building blocks that could drive positive and important changes. For each building block, a desired outcome or description of a future state was articulated, along with a collection of ideas that could ultimately become strategies to achieve that outcome. Both the desired outcome and the associated "ideas" were presented to consultation session participants and survey respondents for consideration. Each of the building blocks are presented in sections 2-1 to 2-5 below, including the desired outcome, associated ideas ranked by mean (indicating level of agreement) and a discussion of the comments provided by consultation session participants and survey respondents. In general, both consultation session participants and survey respondents expressed strong agreement with the various ideas presented under each building block. (See Appendix C – Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes, for detailed results).

Desired outcome:

All students in Alberta will be considered valuable enough to have provincial expectations set for them. The basis of programming for all students, whatever their particular ability, need or gift, will be the Alberta curriculum. The focus will be on working with partners to ensure that teachers are able to use the provincial curriculum to develop programming to meet the specific needs of their students.

Table 2-1: Agreement* with Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome 1

Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome	n	Agreement (number)	Agreement (percent)
Include access to early learning programming in planning for students	2,025	1,955	96%
Develop a system that emphasizes students' strengths and potential rather than limits and deficits	2,025	1,830	90%
Develop a more flexible definition of educational success for all students	2,023	1,852	91%
Involve parents in the development, implementation and assessment of programming for their child	2,009	1,810	90%
Clarify Ministry and school authority requirements for gathering data related to all students, including students with disabilities	1,938	1,764	91%
Use assessment to inform programming	1,978	1,726	87%
Set expectations for all students within the Alberta curriculum	1,990	1,402	71%
Replace coding and labeling with the identification of educational supports, strategies and effective instruction for removing barriers to learning	1,932	1,387	71%
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* Total number and proportion of questionnaire respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each statement.

- Setting Expectations

Many people agreed with the idea of setting high expectations for all students but they had questions about how those expectations would be determined and by whom. Some said, "high expectations lead to high achievement and that is key," while others said, "expectations should be realistic, based on student competencies." They cautioned against type casting students too early and said in setting expectations you have to allow for growth and development. People said this idea will require a whole new sense of what it means to graduate from a high school in Alberta. As such, they said "high expectations" should not solely mean "better test scores." Achievement tests should measure student achievement, not the ability to take a test. They said there should be less focus on teaching checklists and student achievement tests and more on creating independent learners, and suggested that Alberta Education should develop teaching frameworks, within which teachers and learners exercise more control over their own achievements. On the other hand, some people did not like the idea of "setting high expectations" and said they would be more comfortable with the words "maximize potential."

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• Defining Success

In keeping with the idea of setting high expectations, people said success needs to be broadly defined and flexible. For example, they said the idea of "social success/development" should be included with "educational success," as success in social relationships is linked to, and essential for, academic success. To implement this broader definition of success, teachers will require flexible curricula and sufficient numbers of educational assistants and other required resources to meet the needs of a particular classroom's students. Some reminded Alberta Education that parents are an essential part of determining what success is for their children and should be included in setting reasonable goals.

• Curriculum

The current curriculum is "too narrow," people said, and does not meet the diverse learning needs of a broad range of students, especially those with severe cognitive or social emotional disabilities. They said life skills curricula are needed for elementary and secondary level students. Some expressed concerns about modifying the curriculum at the high school level and wondered if this was even possible. At the same time, they asked, "How will students with special needs demonstrate their ability to attend post-secondary settings?" While many agreed that curriculum topics could – and should – be adapted to meet the different needs of students, they strongly advised that this work not be downloaded to teachers: "They simply don't have time to modify the program of studies." Rather, they said these adaptations would have to be developed centrally and made available to all teachers. Others said curriculum was less important to meeting the needs of students than ensuring that teachers (and parents) have sufficient time, materials, resources and training.

• Coding and Assessment

Many people were supportive of removing coding and labeling, although they asked, "if not coding and labeling, then what? What will replace it? How will we ensure students get the supports they need?" They said there has to be a fair and consistent approach to identifying student needs in the absence of coding. Others said coding and labeling are not inherently wrong, pointing out that they provide a common language for educators and other professionals. They suggested that the focus should be on better defining and refining the current coding system to make it more accurate and useful. In any case, they said teachers should be the principal source of data-related information on students, with respect to tracking student development and achievement, and should have an equal voice with any experts in making programming decisions or choices. In addition to assessment, some said we need to have good methods of evaluation to ensure that students are learning both to their potential and the basic literacy and numeracy skills of each grade level: "The principal goal for education for every student remains literacy and numeracy."

• Program Plans

While people liked the idea of individual program plans (IPP) for all students, they said that it might not be realistic to produce a program plan (as they are currently configured) for all students. Some suggested the need for more user friendly, personalized learning planning tools that would allow students to play a greater role in planning their own academic futures. They also said parents and students should be included in the development of program plans. IPPs were seen, by some, as helping to ensure the needs of "mild/moderate" students are better met by the system. Teachers asked where the time and resources for individual program planning would come from and said more educational assistants are needed to help all Alberta students achieve their individual potentials.

- **Transition**

Some people expressed concerns about the impact of transitions on students. They said some students will require additional supports throughout their entire education career and should not lose that support simply because they have moved to grade 10. They recommended that a comprehensive and consistent transition strategy be developed, especially for transitions between elementary, junior high and high school.

- **Early Learning**

Many people said outreach, early screening and early intervention are crucial to ensuring educational success, but they had different ideas and suggestions about what that should include. Some said Alberta Education should make full-time kindergarten mandatory for children at risk, while others said full-time kindergarten should be mandatory for all Alberta children with additional mandatory preschool for children at risk. A number of people talked about Program Unit Funding (PUF) and said funding must continue after the child enters the Grade 1-12 system, "to have maximum effect."

2.2 Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming

Desired outcome:

The education system, made up of the Ministry and its partners, will focus on what students CAN do, rather than on what they are unable to achieve. We will adapt the system to ensure that no student is excluded from being as fully participatory in learning, assessment and classroom experiences as possible.

Table 2-2: Agreement* with Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome 2

Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome	n	Agreement (number)	Agreement (percent)
Ensure that learning resources are available and accessible	2,018	1,937	96%
Create flexible and accessible learning opportunities for every student	1,972	1,772	90%
Ensure that Alberta curriculum is accessible for all students	2,010	1,782	89%
Evaluate students with measurement tools that maximize the possibilities for accessibility	1,951	1,607	82%

* Total number and proportion of questionnaire respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each statement.

- **Need for Clarity**

Some people said this building block and desired outcome were too vague and required greater clarity. They said that the ideas, including "flexible and accessible learning opportunities," lacked a level of detail that they needed for "confidence and comfort."

- **Curriculum and Programs of Study**

People said a strengths-based approach will require a shift in curricula to reflect life skills, character education and critical social skills that students need to succeed in life. They said this means a "re-thinking" of the curriculum to fit diverse learners, rather than a "re-tooling" simply to accommodate them: "What is needed is a more adaptable curriculum, rather than a more accessible one." Some people described an all-encompassing curriculum that would offer different "tracks" and realistic learning outcomes to meet the needs of diverse students. Others said teachers need ready-made curricula and materials for specifically identified education needs, to reduce teacher workloads and ensure consistency across the province.

• Assessment and Evaluation

In the same way that a strengths-based approach will require a re-thinking of curricula, it will require new methods of assessment that will allow all students to demonstrate what they know. Many people said you can't teach in a strengths-based way and then test in a deficit-based way: "paper and pencil tests are only one way of testing and do not play to all students' strengths." They said there needs to be less, even no, emphasis on achievement testing, suggesting that PATs and any other achievement measures only be used by students and educators to refine IPPs. Some suggested that, for some students, cognitive and medical specialists should play a role in assessment, to truly measure strengths. At the same time, they said that consistency and accountability are important and asked, "how can we be sure that the assessment of strengths and abilities will be uniform across the province?"

• Meeting Student Needs

Some people were concerned that a strengths-based approach would neglect or negate a realistic assessment of student needs that are based on deficits. They said "while building assets is important, so is acknowledging needs." In addition, people identified a number of different types of students and student needs that they felt were not specifically addressed by the building blocks. These included gifted and talented students who, they said, "tend to get left out of the funding mechanism and, yet, their needs are real and their difficulties are often substantial." Some people said homeschooled students appeared to be left out of the new direction, while others pointed to the need to take culture and tradition into account when working with students from immigrant backgrounds. A number of people said more attention needs to be given to students with mild and moderate needs.

• Impact on Teachers

One of the most common concerns raised throughout the Phase 2 consultation was the potential impact of a new direction on teachers. People said all of the additional assessment and programming work cannot be added to teacher workloads. Rather, time must be blocked off as part of the teacher's workday schedule; it cannot be an addition. They said the new direction must acknowledge the role – and limitations – of teachers, recognizing how difficult it is to be "all things to all students." In general, however, they were positive about the new direction. They just wanted to be assured that the resources and supports would be in place, saying "we have to find a way of implementing change in practical ways that does not overburden teachers." One suggestion was that teachers develop "training communities" to help each other. Another suggestion was that each school have a person to coordinate the activities connected to this initiative.

• French-Language Resources

People associated with French-language programs said there is a real lack of tools, resources and professionals to help francophone and French immersion students. They said French-language resources, including ready-made curricula and other departmental materials, have to be provided contemporaneously with English-language materials.

Desired outcome:

A team approach to meeting the needs of students. The team would be made up of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, school administrators and educational specialists who all have what they need to work successfully in support of the learner. For students with more complex needs, other specialists would be invited to be part of the team.

Table 2-3: Agreement* with Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome 3

Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome	n	Agreement (number)	Agreement (percent)
Ensure teachers entering the profession have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to respond to students' abilities and needs	1,983	1,890	96%
Develop standards for training of paraprofessionals	2,009	1,866	93%
Provide professional development opportunities for teachers, parents and all members of the learning team	1,993	1,842	92%
Provide specialized personnel to support classroom teachers in the assessment and programming for diverse learners	1,975	1,774	90%
Strengthen the ability of teachers to teach to diversity	1,890	1,687	90%
Strengthen the ability of principals to provide leadership in an inclusive system	1,933	1,701	89%
Develop provincial and/or regional centres that can provide highly specialized expertise and resources for students	1,891	1,570	83%
Reflect the interests of a diverse population of students, including those with disabilities, in all aspects of Alberta Education's work	1,917	1,564	81%

* Total number and proportion of questionnaire respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each statement.

- **Learning Team**

In general, people were very supportive of the learning team idea. They said the learning team is "foundational" to this building block and that all other elements would flow from it. At the same time, they cautioned that building a learning team takes time and resources. A number of people said they wanted more information about how the team would actually work and who it would comprise. A frequent question was, "who leads the learning team?" People also asked "who will resolve any conflicts or professional disagreements that occur within the learning team?" Many people agreed that parents should have an integral role but noted that not all parents are willing or able to be part of the learning team. Some said it may be necessary to provide for legally mandated "advocates" for students if their parents are not involved. A number of people said, where appropriate, the student should be part of the learning team and should be provided training to develop self-advocacy skills. They also suggested that learning teams included student peers to encourage collaboration and relationship building in the classroom.

- **Learning Coaches**

Many people liked the idea of learning coaches but had a number of practical concerns, including the cost of providing such a professional at the school level. They asked, "who is the learning coach and how will this work? Is this the special needs teacher or someone else?" Some suggested that training will need to be provided to enable people to develop the learning

coach specialization. Others were concerned about the availability of such professionals to schools outside of major urban areas. They suggested that the province provide local training and development for these positions, where possible. Distinct from learning coaches, some people said schools should have professionally trained special education consultants on staff or readily available as resources for classroom teachers. In either case, most people said a learning coach or resource teacher should be available in every school.

- **School Leadership**

Managing the changes proposed for the new direction will require "truly inspired leadership," people said, and this role should naturally fall to the principal. They said the principal has a critical role to play in building capacity for inclusive education: "without a principal as a champion of inclusivity, it will not happen in a school." Training was suggested as key to preparing principals for the change. Some wondered if a "philosophy of inclusion" should become a criterion for hiring school administrators.

- **Teacher Training and Professional Development**

In addition to training for principals, training and professional development was identified as critical to achieving this building block. Some agreed with the need to improve pre-service training for teachers, although they pointed out that it will be difficult to influence university programs. They also asked, "what about teachers who are currently in the classroom or teachers who are trained out of province?" and "Is it reasonable to expect that universities can prepare teachers for all the diversity they are likely to find in their classes?" They said while all teachers should be trained to identify students who are struggling and to work with direct assistants in the classroom, there should be a focus on developing special education specialist teachers. Ongoing professional development will also be important, although some point out that this level of professional development "will be expensive" and asked "will there be adequate resources?

- **Training for Paraprofessionals**

While many people agreed with the proposal to set standards and training requirements for educational assistants, they identified a number of potential issues. Some said strict requirements could further complicate recruitment, which is already a challenge for many schools, especially those in rural areas. "It's hard enough to get people – let's not make it harder!" Some said schools, particularly in rural areas, should be permitted to set their own standards for paraprofessional training. Improved on the job training, rather than pre-service training, was also suggested as a way to avoid potential recruitment issues. Many pointed out that higher standards for paraprofessionals would, necessarily, mean higher remuneration. While most supported higher pay "for these important members of the learning team," they flagged it as an issue, given the limits on resources.

- **Other Training**

Some people said building capacity in schools should go beyond the members of the learning team. The pointed to front-line support staff and said they need to feel confident and competent to meet the needs of all students. Some said we need to build "human" capacity, in addition to "educational" capacity, by providing empathy training and a greater focus on compassion.

- **Regional Centres**

Some people were cautiously supportive of regional centres but they wanted more information on what these centres would be and where they would be located. Some suggested that these centres could, in fact, be the school division head office. Those who supported regional centres said they must be hubs for professional development and support – "not places where we ship students!" They said regional centres should engage in dialogue with teachers, rather than provide one way instructions. In contrast, some people did not like the idea of regional centres. They said capacity should be built in schools, not in centres: "schools need to be the hubs." In either case, those from Francophone schools and programs said these hubs will need to provide services in French to meet the specific needs of Francophone students and teachers.

• **Implementation**

People said this building block is a true "rubber meets the road" initiative – it represents massive and complex change, and will require a huge commitment for successful implementation. While they liked the idea, they wondered if differentiated instruction within diverse classrooms is a lofty goal and, possibly, too difficult to achieve. They said there will have to be sufficient time and resources to build capacity in schools but that the changes must not result in more work for teachers and administrators. High levels of accountability will have to be in place to ensure implementation proceeds as planned.

2.4 Collaborating for Learner Success

Desired outcome:

The provision of collaborative and seamless services and supports to students and families. This would aid in the educational success of students and set them up for success in post-secondary settings, the world of work, or assisted living situations – wherever life may take them.

Table 2-4: Agreement* with Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome 4

Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome	n	Agreement (number)	Agreement (percent)
Ensure student records transfer in a timely manner to develop a more efficient flow of student information	2,013	1,973	98%
Create structures at both the provincial and local levels to enable effective cross-ministerial collaboration	1,936	1,805	94%
Include teaching of the collaborative process in pre-service teacher education and in in-service training for principals and school jurisdiction level administrators	1,962	1,827	93%
Establish full-service school models to enhance cross-agency and cross-ministry collaboration and wraparound approach to coordinated services and supports	1,953	1,793	92%
Reduce the disparity of access to cross-ministry services across the province	1,910	1,748	92%
Increase awareness among parents, teachers, and administrators of the importance of parent involvement as laid out in the Learning Team document	1,922	1,766	92%

* Total number and proportion of questionnaire respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each statement.

• **Commitment to Collaboration**

Many people expressed a general "weariness" and "wariness" with the idea of collaboration, saying "we've been talking about collaboration for years – and not doing it. How serious are we this time?" While they agreed that collaboration is necessary, they want to see a true commitment to collaboration in the form of ongoing supports to schools to make collaboration possible. They do not want structures or additional layers of bureaucracy, rather, they want less structure and more flexibility to enable meaningful collaboration.

• **Single Point of Entry**

A single point of entry to services and supports would be welcomed by all stakeholders – students, parents, teachers and service providers. Many agreed with the concept of "one stop shopping" but cautioned that this level of collaboration will require significant change to the current educational structure. In general, they said a team approach to assessment and programming must be kept simple, accessible and school-based. Issues like long waiting times, multiple layers of assessment, and a bureaucratic approach to decision making must be effectively addressed. A case manager

model was suggested, where someone who is not a teacher is responsible for collaboration and coordination of services. Some said the education system could learn from the health care system's "patient navigator" model. Others said the system should "embrace the philosophy of community schools," where school buildings are true hubs and services are provided before and after school and on weekends. Some Francophone participants suggested there be one provincial point of entry for Francophone schools and programs.

• Resources for Collaboration

People said effective collaboration requires time and space. They said time must be built into the system to enable members of the learning team to work together for a student, rather than operating in isolation. Many also pointed to the practical need for space in a school to accommodate the various members of a team and asked, "Can schools truly meet this need?" Smaller schools are particularly pressed to provide adequate space for collaboration but it remains an issue across the system, regardless of school size. People said there needs to be a new formula for determining space requirements in schools, recognizing the requirements for collaboration.

• Training for Collaboration

People said collaboration doesn't happen naturally; it requires a certain way of thinking and a specific skill set to be effective. They said many members of the learning team do not understand their roles and are unaware of the resources available to them. In order to achieve the necessary culture shift, teachers, administrators and other members of the learning team must receive ongoing training for collaboration. Training must also be available continuously to ensure new members of the learning team can be quickly brought on board.

• Alignment of Mandates

The cross-ministry collaboration needed for learner success will require an alignment of mandates, policies and boundaries. While some people said it may be "impossible" to align mandates, others said it will take "extraordinary will" but that it's important and necessary work. They said everyone must share a common understanding of inclusive education and be willing to do whatever it takes to achieve that vision. Some suggested that Alberta Education look at the cross-ministry Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) model used by Alberta Children and Youth Services, which they said does a good job of assessing children's needs and giving parents significant opportunity to be involved in decisions about the kinds of services provided.

• Student Records

Ensuring timely transfer of student records received the highest level of agreement from survey respondents (see Table 2-4) and was strongly supported by consultation session participants. Many people took this one step further, saying not only should records be transferred promptly but they must also be attended to promptly at the other end. They said student records come with an obligation that they be read, noting that this frequently does not happen. Some people said the province should develop a student information system, similar to the electronic health record, that would not only facilitate the transfer of student records but would also contribute to their accuracy, standardization and consistency.

• Implementation

Although people were generally supportive of ideas like full-service school models and wraparound services, many were concerned that the barriers to bringing it all into being could be insurmountable. They pointed to the fact that schools are already stretched for space and that there are insufficient numbers of specialists to fill existing positions. These challenges are particularly acute in rural areas, they said, where non-education specialists are not easy to access. Some people also pointed to the need for meaningful collaboration with the First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) community. They said many of the outcomes proposed for the new direction are unrealistic until the shortfall in resources – particularly professional resources – is resolved.

Desired outcome:

A system that is proactive about meeting the needs of students and is progressive about incorporating leading edge learning resources and technologies in the education of all students, including those with disabilities.

Table 2-5: Agreement* with Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome 5

Possible Ways to Achieve Outcome	n	Agreement (number)	Agreement (percent)
Develop accessible learning resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all Alberta students	1,993	1,887	95%
Increase access to assistive technologies and specialized services using technology	1,975	1,823	92%
Implement guidelines for accessible resources for resource developers, publishers and school authorities	1,905	1,757	92%
Use available technologies, including SuperNet and videoconferencing, to enhance access to specialized resources, including professionals with expertise	1,964	1,803	92%

* Total number and proportion of questionnaire respondents who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each statement.

- **"All means ALL"**

A number of people reacted to the use of the phrase "including those with disabilities" in the desired outcome. They said "if you say all students, you should mean ALL students." Assistive technology, they said, is about leveling the playing field so that ALL students have equal opportunities to succeed.

- **Cost / Resources**

Many people pointed to the cost implications of remaining "leading edge," given the rapid pace of changing technology. While they agreed that technology could be an important tool for students, teachers and other members of the learning team, they were unsure if a commitment to "leading edge" technology could be sustained. They said educational materials and tools can quickly become obsolete, without ongoing upgrades, updates and maintenance. They also saw a need for on-site information technology (IT) staff to provide training, support and repairs. Some said technology is a huge budgetary consideration for schools and, therefore, should not be included in policy discussion.

- **Provincial Guidelines and Procurement**

A provincial approach to technology procurement was proposed by many people as a means to control costs (through economies of scale), provide equitable access and ensure compatibility across the system. At the same time, some people said the province should establish flexible guidelines and resources that will allow teachers and schools to purchase technologies, including assistive technologies, to best meet the needs of individual students.

- **Training**

People said that to remain "leading edge" in the use of learning resources and technologies will require a major investment in training and professional development. They said the "right" resources will only be available if all learning team members – including parents – know how to use the technology used by or with the student.

- **People before Technology**

A number of people said technology is only as good as the people who use it and that it should be used deliberately and with a specific purpose in mind. They said technology should not be allowed to replace or outweigh the important personal contact between students and teachers.

For example, many people said videoconferencing should not be the norm, particularly when providing services for younger students. They said while videoconferencing has its place – particularly in professional development for staff – it cannot replace the importance of face to face interaction between students and/or families and service providers.

2.6 What We Heard from Youth

Some of the key ideas from the five building blocks were presented to youth to get their perspective on a new direction for special education. Results are shown in Table 2-1. It is noteworthy that youth strongly supported the notion of "focusing on student strengths" as their favourite idea for achieving an inclusive education system. Adult respondents were also strongly supportive of this idea (see Table 2-1). The low ranking given to "use technology" may reflect the same concern expressed by adult respondents that technology not replace personal contact between teachers and students.

Table 2-6: A Youth Perspective on Special Education in Alberta (N=434)

Question: In a recent Speak Out poll, 48% of you said that the goal of special education should be to support students to reach their highest potential, and 22% of you said that it should be to help ALL students to finish high school. Here are some of the ideas that could help achieve these goals in an inclusive education system. Please mark your favourite ideas, by numbering them 1, 2, 3.

Ideas to Achieve an Inclusive Education System	N	Favorite Ideas by Number of #1, 2 or 3 Rankings (number)	Favorite Ideas by Number of #1, 2 or 3 Rankings (percent)
Focus on strengths	434	239	55%
Encourage students' confidence in their future	434	214	49%
Find a range of ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge	434	212	49%
Help all students to feel they belong	434	165	38%
Equip all teachers and principals to deal with diverse learners	434	121	28%
Early identification of students with special education needs	434	104	24%
Teach all students to value diversity	434	86	20%
Include students with special education needs in all aspects of school life	434	80	18%
Use technology	434	61	14%

3. Advice on Moving Change Forward

- **Be Bold...BUT Proceed Slowly**

People encouraged Alberta Education to be "bold, brave and optimistic," in pursuing a new direction for special education. They said, "don't be afraid to take risks." At the same time, they said, "don't let deadlines drive decisions. Let's proceed cautiously and smartly." Do not change for change sake, rather, be sure to keep those things that work. Yes, change is needed, they said, but let's make sure we do it right!

- **Establish Trust**

It will be necessary to build trust among all the stakeholders and Alberta Education, if this initiative is to succeed. To build a fundamentally different system, people said we have to believe that we share a common commitment to student success.

Desired outcome:

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• Establish Trust

It will be necessary to build trust among all the stakeholders and Alberta Education, if this initiative is to succeed. To build a fundamentally different system, people said we have to believe that we share a common commitment to student success.

- **Change the Culture**

A new direction for special education will require more than just "tinkering" with the existing system, people said. It will require a major cultural change or "paradigm shift" – across ministries, within school districts and in school communities. That shift must start with policy makers and leaders in our government and education system, they said. The School Act must reflect this vision and new way of working. They said changing mindsets and attitudes is big work and will take time but it has to be a priority. Some noted that we will need a shift in the language we use – both in school and in society – to get rid of labels and celebrate diversity.

- **Keep Students Front and Centre**

Don't lose sight of the REASON for change, people said. "Remember who we serve – let's keep students at the centre of all our planning and decision making." We need to prevent students from "falling through the cracks," they said, especially those whose disabilities are "mild to moderate" and currently get little support.

- **Open Communication**

People who participated in the consultation said "let's keep talking!" They said open and ongoing communication will essential to creating this new future.

- **True Inclusion**

People encouraged Alberta Education to develop a truly inclusive education model, where all the necessary supports for individual success are with the students in the classroom. This includes adjusting the classroom environment for students with visual or auditory impairments, keeping class sizes small enough to allow optimal student-teacher ratios, taking student needs into account and offering pull-outs. At the same time, they said we have to acknowledge that classroom inclusion of students with violent behaviours or with very high level needs does not work. Safety of teachers and students should be a priority for any decisions about placing a student into a regular classroom. The needs of the student, too, may truly be best served in a specialized environment, they said.

- **Ideal vs. Reality**

Some people said many of the proposed "outcomes" are idealistic and are not practically achievable. For example, they pointed to "achieve full potential" and said it is impossible: "none of us is living to his or her full potential." They advised Alberta Education to review the language used to ensure the new direction is realistic and attainable.

- **Resources**

Although most people agreed with the new direction, many were concerned about the level of resourcing and professional development required for effective implementation. Some said "this new direction will be much too costly: to our teachers, learners, and taxpayers." They said the focus should be on finding efficiencies in the education system, such as grouping "like with like" in specialized schools or classrooms, rather than trying to accommodate all manner of difference.

- **Flexibility**

People said we do not really know what the future might look like. For that reason, any new direction must be agile and adaptable. They said flexibility will be the key, at the system-level but particularly at the level of classroom, teacher and student.

- **Change is Not Needed**

A minority of people (e.g., 52 among survey respondents) said "I don't want to see this new direction implemented." They said the current system just needs some "tweaking" in order to meet these same objectives. They were particularly concerned that the costs of the new direction would outweigh the benefits and said "students and families need more choices in programs and venues, not less."

Setting the Direction for Special Education – Summary of Community Meetings

Background

Opportunities were provided for all Albertans to participate either in person or online in the consultation process for Setting the Direction for Special Education. There was no formal tracking of involvement by First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) people in either the on-line or the community consultation process but based on the limited FNMI input received, the Setting the Direction for Special Education Steering Committee and the Project Team believed that Aboriginal people were underrepresented. In response, the Project Team proposed a series of FNMI-specific consultations and in preparation, consulted with FNMI staff within various Ministries on both locations and format of the dialogue. As a result, five additional FNMI-specific community sessions were held across Alberta including: Lethbridge, Calgary, St. Paul, Edmonton, and High Prairie. Fort McMurray and Grand Prairie also participated via videoconference with High Prairie. The consultation process was adapted to be more reflective and respectful of Aboriginal ways of engagement. A total of 115 individuals (parents/caregivers, teachers, trustees, administrators, etc) participated and provided feedback and insight into the proposed framework. Each session provided an overview of the Setting the Direction for Special Education initiative and introduced the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles along with a definition of inclusion used in the proposed framework. After a sharing of this information, participants were given the opportunity to share stories, voice concerns, and comment on the progress of Setting the Direction for Special Education. The following is a summary of the key themes that emerged at the community consultations.

Process Issues - Consult us earlier

Although FNMI participants acknowledged that they could have participated in any of the community sessions or on-line, they welcomed the opportunity to participate in FNMI homogenous sessions. The majority of participants were highly appreciated of the efforts that the Ministry had made in attempting to reach out to the FNMI community. Two sites in particular expressed concern about the late-day invitation for homogenous FNMI group participation in the consultation process. A number of people asked why FNMI people were being asked to respond to a draft framework that did not appear to include an Aboriginal perspective. One individual in particular expressed concern about being asked to respond to a framework, which was in their estimation, absent of Aboriginal insight. A number of FNMI people talked about the fact that they were not aware of Setting the Direction for Special Education and questioned what efforts had been made to reach out in the FNMI community and that with more notice, more FNMI people could have been present. One participant felt that the process treated him like a "second-class" citizen and an Inuit participant was concerned about the limited numbers of Inuit people participating in the consultation. While in general FNMI participants voiced their appreciation to be a part of the process, they were also concerned about whether or not their voices would be heard so late in the day. Others asked about Aboriginal representation on both the Steering Committee and Stakeholder Working Group and felt that given the importance and impact of this review upon FNMI students that there needed to be greater FNMI representation at the planning table.

Inclusion

Some of the most moving and poignant discussions in the FNMI rooms revolved around the concept of inclusion. Repeatedly, FNMI participants told us that inclusion of students with special needs into typical school environments was very much the Aboriginal way of life and that in fact, there was no word or translation in Blackfoot or Cree for "segregation," "special education," "coding" or "labeling." "They just don't translate," said one participant. FNMI participants welcomed the definition of inclusion as it ensured that all students were welcomed into a supportive and respectful environment. Some FNMI participants indicated that they appreciated that the proposed special education framework moves in a direction that was more reflective of Aboriginal peoples' way of living. Many, many FNMI participants said that all children are gifts from the Creator and stressed that all children have different needs, and hence all should be accepted as integral parts of the school community. Said one FNMI participant and caregiver of a child with special needs, "We need to see our children with special needs as gifts that come to us to teach us how to love and understand and accept others and show compassion.

Coding/Labeling

Throughout all FNMI consultations, participants overwhelmingly agreed that labeling a student as special needs is destructive. Many felt that labels contributed to stigma and reinforced racist stereotypes often associated with FNMI students in general. "Often we see our students go off reserve for schooling and they are quickly labeled as special needs when there are other factors or cultural differences at play versus a learning disability." Caregivers in particular indicated that labels could follow students throughout their lives, having significant impacts on their self-esteem and self-value. "The medical model, which focuses on weaknesses rather than strengths, creates labels that damage a child," said one participant.

Defining and Reaching Caregivers

In the consultations, we were frequently reminded that family members beyond parents (grandparents, aunts and uncles) often play a substantive role in a child's life and that the definition of family must be broadened to better reflect this unique Aboriginal dynamic. "Do not presume," said one parent, that only parents are involved in raising a child in our community."

Some FNMI parents/caregivers expressed the concern that some parents/caregivers pass on their own difficult experiences with the school system to their children. Repeatedly administrators, teachers and trustees spoke about the complexity of ensuring meaningful involvement of parents/caregivers in the decisions affecting children with special needs when parents/caregivers themselves sometimes struggle with a lack of education, poverty, addiction and their own personal learning disabilities. We were reminded that not all FNMI parents/caregivers have the resources to work with the school system to find an appropriate solution to their child's issues and that efforts must be considered in this framework on how parents/caregivers will be supported in representing their children's needs.

This issue was restated when parents/caregivers talked about the need to better involve parents/caregivers in the educational system. "Parents and caregivers needs to feel comfortable and welcome in the school environment if we are maximize on their involvement," said one teacher.

Incorporate Aboriginal Culture

Many participants talked about the need for FNMI culture to be both learned and embraced within the school curriculum. We heard stories from parents/caregivers and educational representatives who felt that embracing the FNMI culture within the school system made a significant impact on improving FNMI student success and decreased the number of coded children within the FNMI community. Many FNMI participants said that school staff needed to be better trained and aware of FNMI cultural aspects, which they believed would strengthen a child's connection to the classroom. One post secondary student participant said "Teachers need to be educated about the specific environment they will be going in to teach before they attempt to be part of it...College and University programs should be revised in these areas."

Valuing the Whole Child

In many of the gatherings across Alberta, FNMI participants voiced the need for a holistic approach to education that moved the definition of education beyond academic performance as an indicator of success at school. Many spoke about the need for greater emphasis on a child's emotional, mental and social well being, especially in instances of children who may come from compromised environments.

Many participants felt that provincial achievement tests were problematic for Aboriginal children in general. One participant felt that the focus on traditional academic measurements work in stark contrast to the Aboriginal approach to education, which places value on the traditional ways of Aboriginal people. "Learning to hunt and be connected to nature is a critical part of our culture," said one FNMI participant. "But the current system does not place value on its worth."

Provincial and Federal Government Collaboration

While acknowledging that jurisdictionally, education on reserves is a federal responsibility, many participants indicated that their children are Albertans, and that Alberta Education needs to be "more present" in the education of children on reserve schools. Many FNMI participants felt that Alberta Education systematically ignored students attending reserve schools. FNMI participants asked for better bridging between schools on reserves and the Ministry of Education. "We need to figure out ways to have the two systems come closer together," said one participant. "How do we get some of the [proposed] strategies identified here and implemented on reserve schools," said another participant.

Cross Ministry Collaboration

FNMI participants also expressed that supporting children with special education needs requires support from a range of ministries and services providers and that collaboration between Alberta Education, Alberta Health Services, Children and Youth Services, Solicitor General, Alberta Justice (to name a few) is essential if children are to be adequately served and supported. Parents/caregivers and administrators alike spoke of the challenge of providing services to children in the face of silo-like government departments who, in their opinion, typically did not communicate with one another.

Education throughout life

FNMI participants stressed that education begins at the early stages of a child's life and continues on well after the student leaves the education system. Many participants said that supports needed to be in place early in a child's life as soon as a need is identified. "Doing so strengthens their success in schools when they reach grade 1" said one participant. Many passionate remarks were offered up by parents/caregivers who said that support for children with special needs did not stop after grade 12 and that the system must help students transition to post secondary or working environments, too." "What happens once students leave schools either to go onto post secondary or into the community?" asked one caregiver.

Accountability and Funding

Many participants talked about the need to adequately fund supports for children with special needs and repeatedly, rooms talked about the need to ensure that our education system was better funded. Reference was frequently made to special funding for school authorities attempting to address their own community's unique characteristics such as locality and isolation and population make-up. One group talked about the impact FNMI-specific funds can have on school authorities and on the quality of education students are receiving as a result of the money. One consultation group spoke at length about the need for schools and school authorities to be held more accountable for the use of specially earmarked funds for FNMI students. Many felt that parents/caregivers need to be made more aware of program options, technological aids and resources available through the funding available to them by the Ministry. Students should benefit from the support they receive yet most parents/caregivers are not even aware it exists, said a number of participants.

What we heard, Mission, Vision, Principles, and Inclusion

During FNMI consultations, we introduced the definition of inclusion along with the proposed Mission, Vision, and Principles of Setting the Direction for Special Education. We asked participants to provide their feedback. The following outlines what we heard.

Participants liked...

FNMI participants had positive reactions to the concept of every student being successful. They were receptive to the definition of inclusion, stating that it is positive to go forward, and ensure every student belongs. Participants were in favor of supporting all children to reach their highest potential, thereby empowering students to be successful in school and life.

Participants enjoyed the proactive, innovative language and ideas presented to them. They felt that a holistic approach is something they encourage.

Participants also appreciated the respect for diversity within the system while still including everyone.

FNMI participants liked the focus on parent and teacher collaboration. They felt this could empower the parent, and create a partnership between families and teachers thereby strengthening the focus on the needs of the student.

Participants wanted us to look closer at...

After examining the definition of inclusion, along with the proposed Mission, Vision, and Principles of Setting the Direction for Special Education, FNMI participants wanted us to examine several areas for clarification.

Participants felt that it would be hard to define and measure success.

Participants voiced the concern that not all people could understand the language within the proposed document. They wanted the language to be accessible to everyone.

FNMI participants were concerned about the implementation of the proposed framework. They voiced concern regarding funding, timing, and training. They felt that although the process is heading in the right direction, they were pessimistic about the outcome.

FNMI participants noted that it takes more than policy to teach empathy and understanding. FNMI communities felt that the incorporation of culture and values is not an easy task. Students experience labeling and discrimination because of a lack of understanding, and said that a policy framework will not eliminate prejudices. They also felt that the ideas of embracing diversity and an inclusive system are contradictory ideas.

A common theme in participant feedback concerned parent and teacher training. FNMI participants felt it is necessary to provide parents/caregivers and teachers with the necessary resources to support students with special needs. Consultation participants want teachers to be required to take courses on special education in university in order to support all students in their classrooms.

A point was made that there was sometimes a tendency to label Aboriginal children as having special needs (sometimes without rigorous testing) simply because of their race and that this was even more evident for children who enter provincial schools after they have been in reserve schools.

They also felt standardized testing is culturally biased, preventing their children from being successful. Participants suggested that areas for growth replace the system of labeling and coding.

FNMI participants wanted clarification on stakeholders and their relationship to special education. They felt that "stakeholders" was a broad term that did not define specific groups of people affected by the proposed educational reform.

Consultation participants were concerned that the process, framework, and implementation could be eliminated with a cabinet shuffle. They felt that this is a great initiative, but were concerned that Setting the Direction for Special Education could be ineffective if it is not championed at the highest level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In general, most people were supportive of the directions and ideas presented in Phase 2. Many of the themes from Phase 1 were reiterated or put into context with each of the building blocks, including the need for more resources, professionals and classroom assistants. A key theme heard throughout was that the new direction must not increase the workload on teachers and administrators and, in fact, should reduce the workload. A number of respondents who were enthusiastic about the new direction were, at the same time, concerned about the challenges to actually bringing it about – including cost and shortage of non-educational specialists. Overall, respondents said don't lose sight of the student in this redesign and continue to recognize the primacy of student-teacher relationship.

Consultation Methods

1. Community consultation sessions were held across Alberta in March 2009. The purpose of the community consultation sessions was to:

   - Affirm what was heard in the Phase 1 consultations and to determine whether this input was adequately reflected in a draft Vision, Mission and Principles for the Setting the Direction Initiative;
   - Share a proposed system re-design to support achieving the Vision; and
   - Obtain further ideas and advice on moving change forward.

   Participants included parents, teachers, school officials, service providers, school board representatives, government representatives and other interested stakeholder. A total of 16 consultation sessions involving 871 participants were held.

A number of mechanisms were used to record input from the consultation sessions, including:

- A paper "placemat," which participants were invited to complete as a group/table to provide structured feedback on the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles;
- Transcription of flipcharts used in small group discussions on the five building blocks;
- Notes taken by designated notetakers and
- Observations recorded and reported by the session Moderator.

These qualitative data were then reviewed, collated and analyzed to identify common themes.

2. A **public survey** was conducted through an online and hardcopy discussion guide and questionnaire, available in both French and English. The purpose of the public survey was to measure the extent to which Albertans support the proposed Vision, Mission and Principles and the specific elements, or building blocks, that will contribute to one education system that supports all students.

   A total of 2,088 questionnaires were completed, including 1,819 completed by individual respondents and 269 completed by groups. Groups ranged in size from 2 to 200 members, representing some 3,427 individuals. Teachers represented over half of all respondents. Other notable groups included parents, teaching assistants, school administrators/principals and service providers.

   Open-ended question responses ("qualitative data") were reviewed, coded and entered, along with closed-ended question data ("quantitative data"), into SPSS 16.0 for collation and analysis.

3. A **youth survey** was conducted with youth who participated in Speak Out forums across the province in February 2009. (Speak Out is an Alberta Student Engagement Initiative providing youth the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts regarding issues important to them with education decision-makers.) Participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire (on a postcard) that asked them to rank a series of eight ideas – from 1 to 3 – that could help to build an inclusive education system in Alberta. A total of 434 questionnaires were completed. The average age of respondents was 15.73 years.

Survey Respondents and Session Participants by Type

Table B-1: Session Participants (n=800)

Parent	5.4%
Parent of student with special education needs	20.4
Student	0.3
Teacher	23.3
Teacher assistant	0.0
School administrator (principal)	3.6
Trustee	9.8
Representative of a school authority (school board administrator)	13.4
Representative of government	5.7
Representative of a university	1.0
Representative of a service provider	7.4
Other	9.6
	99.9%*

- These percentages are based on 800 participants (out of the total 871 participants) who registered in advance of the community consultation sessions and indicated their category of representation.

Survey Respondents by Type

Tables B-2 and B-3 provide a breakdown of respondent type for questionnaire respondents. Given the following issues, however, we cannot make a definitive statement about the number of each type of respondent who completed a questionnaire.

- Survey respondents could choose to complete a questionnaire as an individual or group. In both cases, they were asked to refer to a list of respondent types and to indicate their association or membership in a particular respondent or stakeholder group. A total of 269 questionnaires were received from groups, representing 3,427 individuals. While most of these groups represented a single type of respondent, at least 62 groups had "mixed" membership and 14 groups did not specify respondent type. For this reason, it is not possible to categorize all group responses into respondent type and combine them with individual responses to report a "total number" for each respondent type.
- In addition, due to a technical error, "type of respondent" data for individual respondents was not collected for the first 613 online questionnaires. It is possible that the "respondent type" data collected from the subsequent online questionnaires is representative of the total group of individual respondents (n=1,819), given the large sample size. However, this claim cannot be made with certainty.

Table B-2: Individual Respondents by Type of Respondent (n=1,206)

Type of Respondent	n	%
Parent	189	16%
Parent of student with special education needs	142	12%
Student	7	12%
Teacher	546	45%
Teacher assistant	113	9%
School administrator (principal)	74	6%
Trustee	17	1%
Representative of a school authority (school board administrator)	25	2%
Representative of government	8	
Representative of a university	6	
Representative of a service provider	39	3%
Other: Special needs facilitator/counselor/advocate	13	1%
Other: Interested person	27	2%
TOTAL	1206	

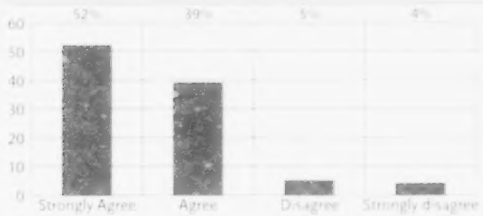
Table B-3: Group Respondents by Type of Respondent (n=269)

Group type	# groups	total members
Parents	5	72
Parents of student with special education needs (exclusively)	7	241
Students	1	6
Teachers	113	2010
Teacher assistants	9	116
School administrators (principals)	17	81
Trustees	4	39
Representatives of a school authority (school board administrator)	8	43
Representatives of government	4	8
Representatives of a university	1	20
Representatives of a service provider	21	76
Other: Regulatory college	2	9
Other: Integrated service team	1	6
Other: Not specified	14	49
Parents and teachers	13	54
Parents, teachers and school administrators	7	204
Teachers and school administrators	34	257
Teachers and teacher assistants	3	41
Teachers, teacher assistants and administrators	5	95
TOTAL	269	3427

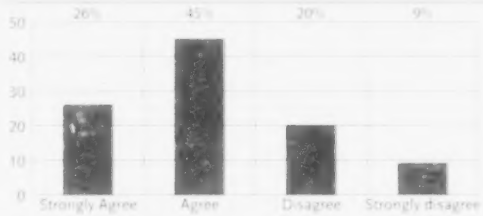
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #1: Setting High Expectations for All Students

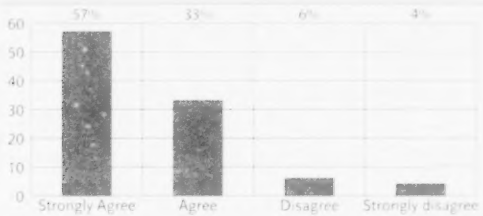
Develop a more flexible definition of educational success for all students



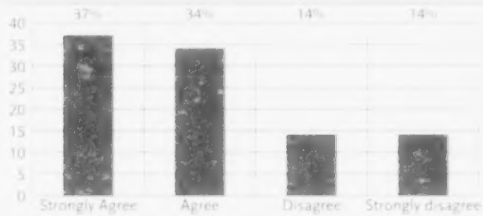
Set expectations for all students within the Alberta curriculum



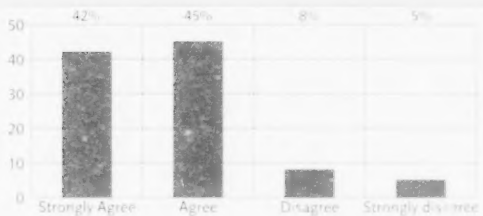
Develop a system that emphasizes students' strengths and potential rather than limits and deficits



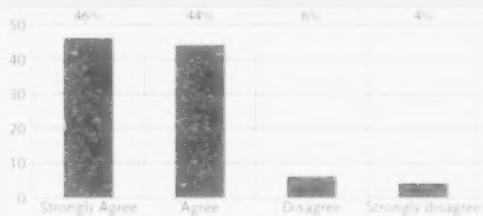
Replace coding and labeling with the identification of educational supports, strategies and effective instruction for removing barriers to learning



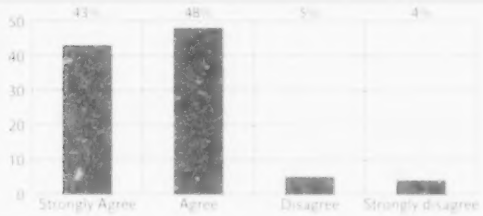
Use assessment to inform programming



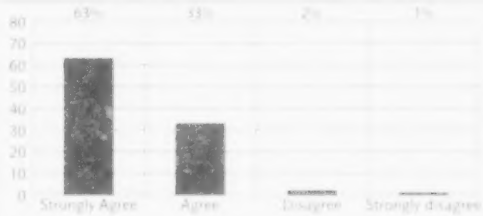
Involve parents in the development, implementation and assessment of programming for their child



Clarify Ministry and school authority requirements for gathering data related to all students, including students with disabilities



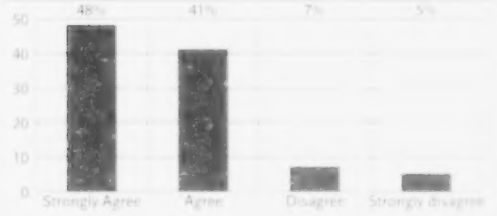
Include access to early learning programming in planning for students



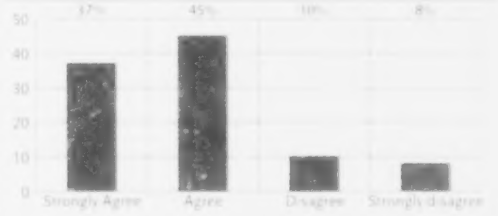
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #2: Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming

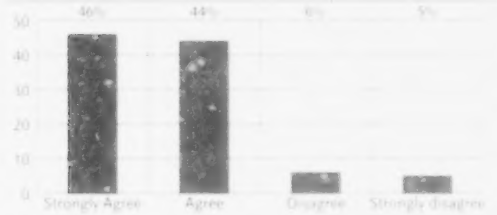
Ensure that Alberta curriculum is accessible for all students



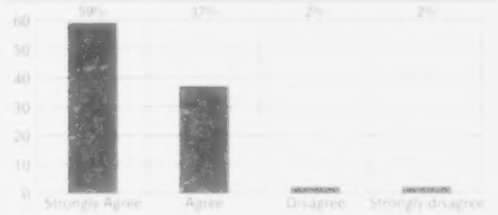
Evaluate students with measurement tools that maximize the possibilities for accessibility



Create flexible and accessible learning opportunities for every student



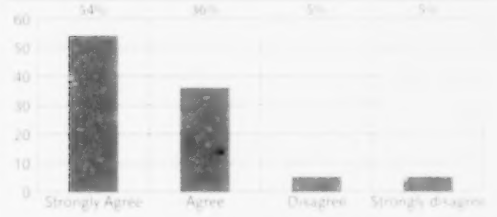
Ensure that learning resources are available and accessible



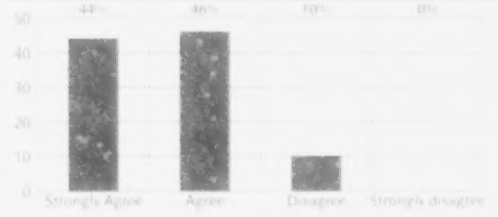
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #3: Building Capacity for School Based Staff and the Learning Team

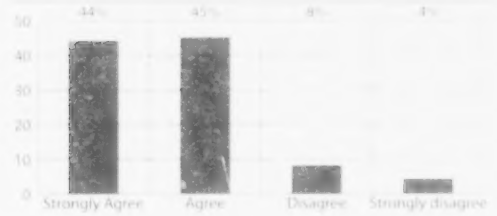
Provide specialized personnel to support classroom teachers in the assessment and programming for diverse learners



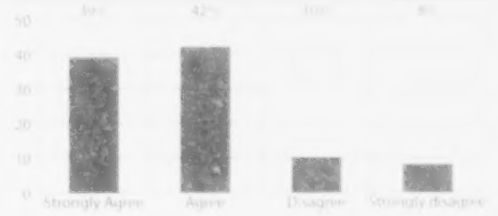
Strengthen the ability of teachers to teach to diversity



Strengthen the ability of principals to provide leadership in an inclusive system



Reflect the interests of a diverse population of students, including those with disabilities, in all aspects of Alberta Education's work

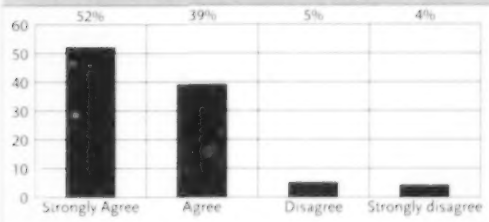


APPENDIX C1

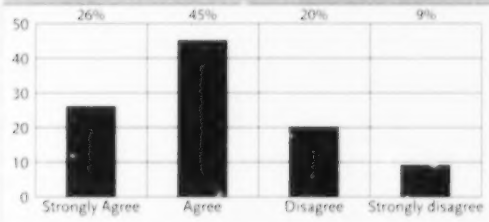
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #1: Setting High Expectations for All Students

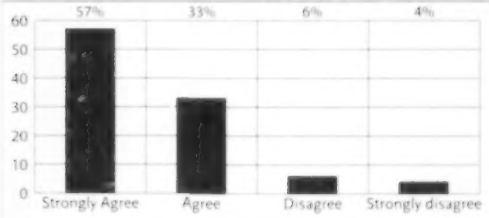
Develop a more flexible definition of educational success for all students



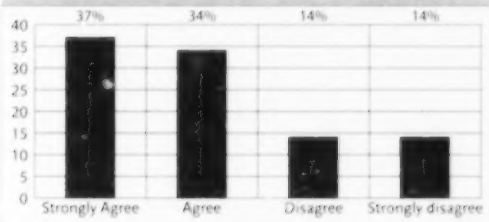
Set expectations for all students within the Alberta curriculum



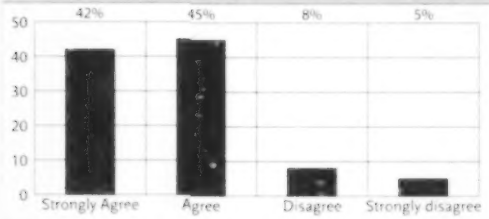
Develop a system that emphasizes students' strengths and potential rather than limits and deficits



Replace coding and labeling with the identification of educational supports, strategies and effective instruction for removing barriers to learning



Use assessment to inform programming



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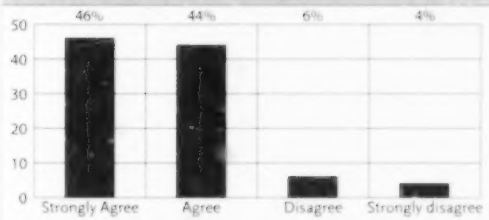
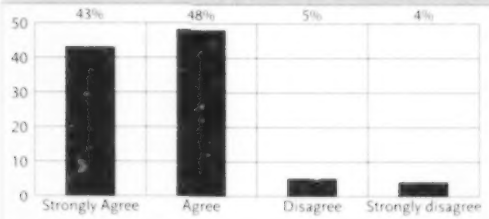
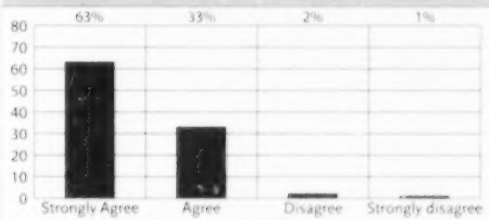


Clarify Ministry and school authority requirements for gathering data related to all students, including students with disabilities



Include access to early learning programming in planning for students

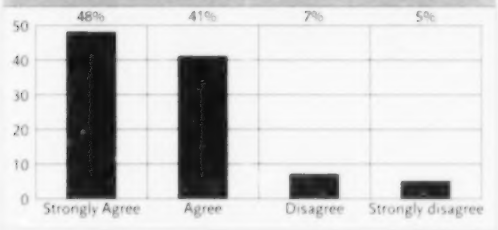


APPENDIX C2

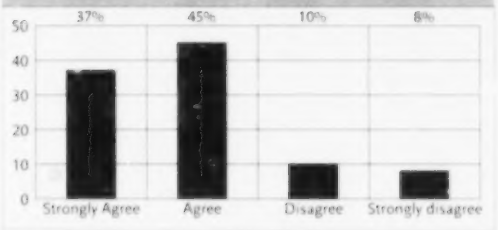
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #2: Using Strengths and Abilities to Drive Programming

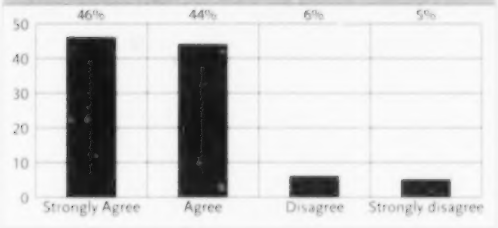
Ensure that Alberta curriculum is accessible for all students



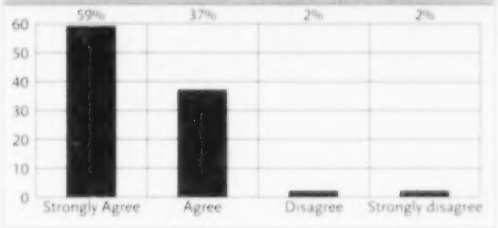
Evaluate students with measurement tools that maximize the possibilities for accessibility



Create flexible and accessible learning opportunities for every student



Ensure that learning resources are available and accessible

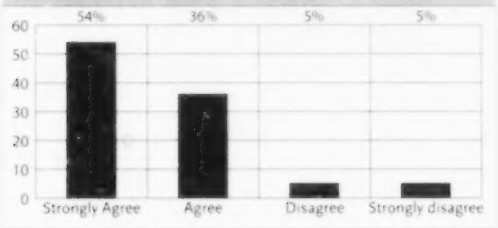


APPENDIX C3

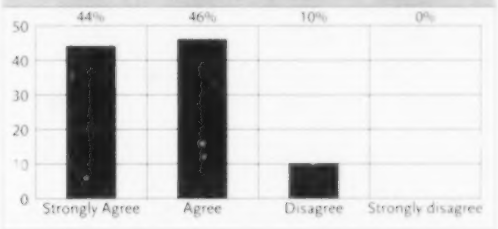
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #3: Building Capacity for School Based Staff and the Learning Team

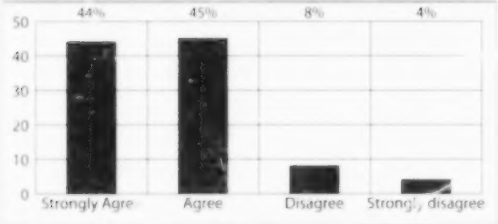
Provide specialized personnel to support classroom teachers in the assessment and programming for diverse learners



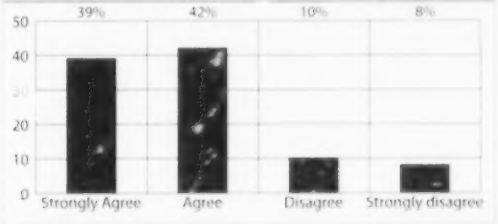
Strengthen the ability of teachers to teach to diversity



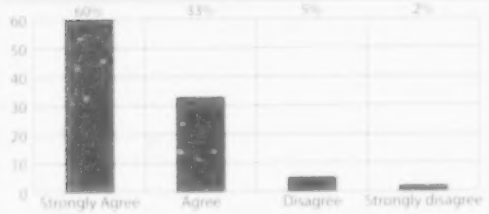
Strengthen the ability of principals to provide leadership in an inclusive system



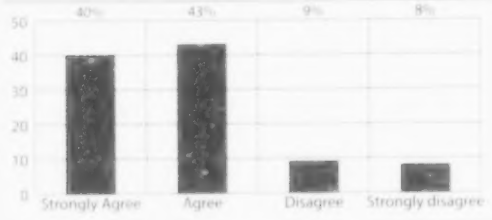
Reflect the interests of a diverse population of students, including those with disabilities, in all aspects of Alberta Education's work



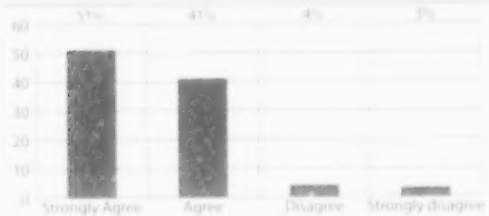
Develop standards for training of paraprofessionals



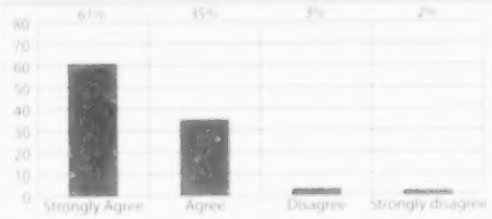
Develop provincial and/or regional centres that can provide highly specialized expertise and resources for students



Provide professional development opportunities for teachers, parents and all members of the learning team



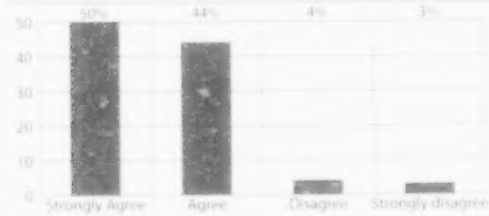
Ensure teachers entering the profession have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to respond to students' abilities and needs



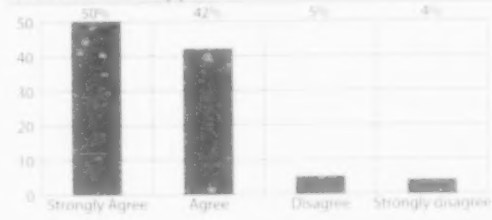
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #4: Collaborating for Learner Success

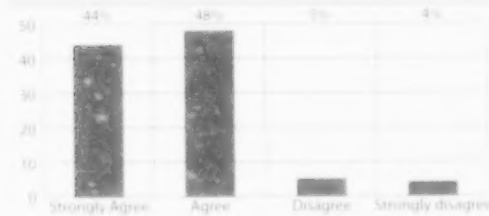
Create structures at both the provincial and local levels to enable effective cross-ministerial collaboration



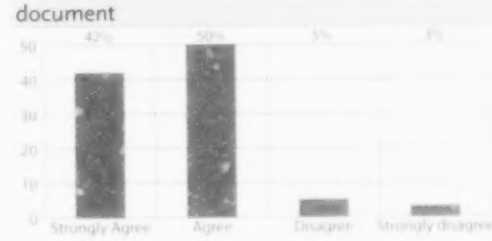
Establish full-service school models to enhance cross-agency and cross-ministry collaboration and wraparound approach to coordinated services and supports



Reduce the disparity of access to cross-ministry services across the province



Increase awareness among parents, teachers, and administrators of the importance of parent involvement as laid out in the Learning Team document



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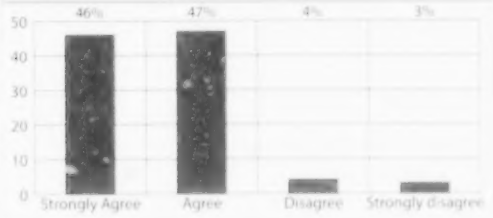
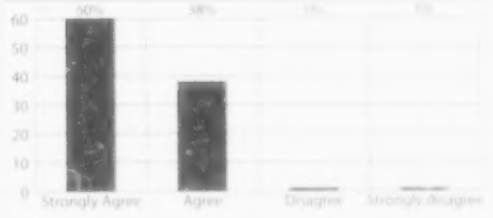


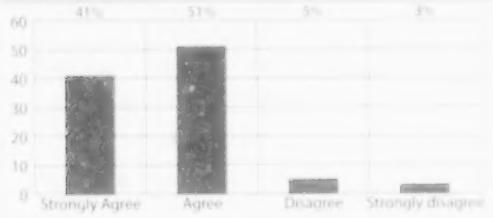
Ensure student records transfer in a timely manner to develop a more efficient flow of student information



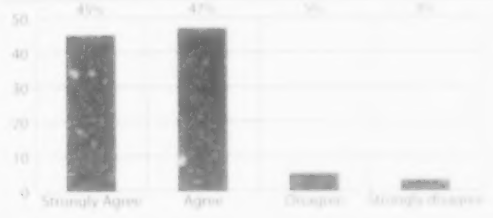
Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #5: Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for 21st Century Learners

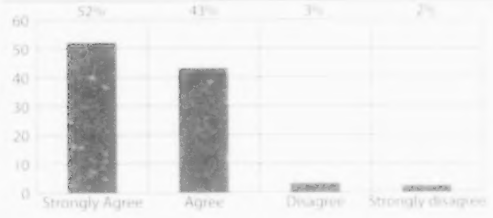
Use available technologies, including SuperNet and videoconferencing, to enhance access to specialized resources, including professionals with expertise



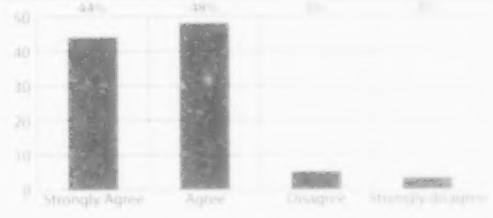
Increase access to assistive technologies and specialized services using technology



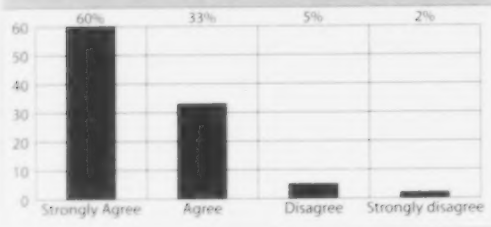
Develop accessible learning resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all Alberta students



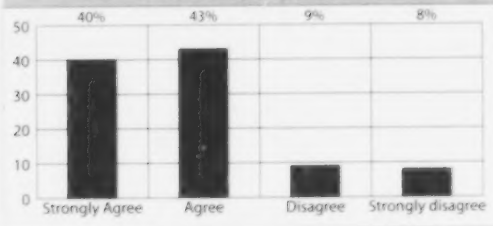
Implement guidelines for accessible resources for resource developers, publishers and school authorities



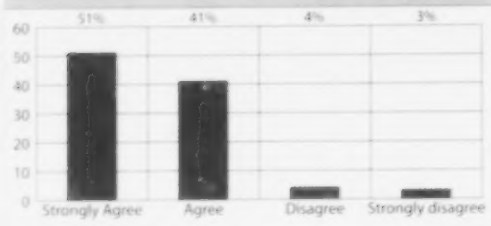
Develop standards for training of paraprofessionals



Develop provincial and/or regional centres that can provide highly specialized expertise and resources for students



Provide professional development opportunities for teachers, parents and all members of the learning team

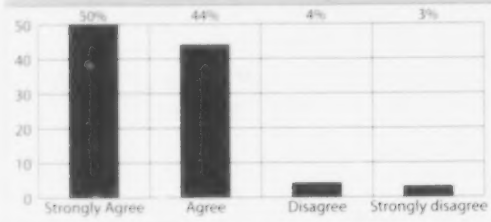


Ensure teachers entering the profession have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to respond to students' abilities and needs

Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #4: Collaborating for Learner Success

Create structures at both the provincial and local levels to enable effective cross-ministerial collaboration



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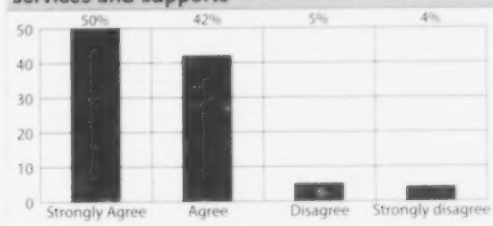

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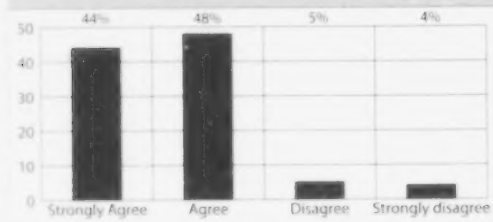
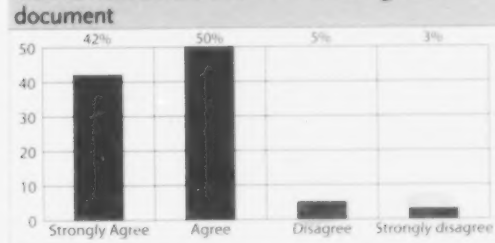


Increase awareness among parents, teachers, and administrators of the importance of parent involvement as laid out in the Learning Team document



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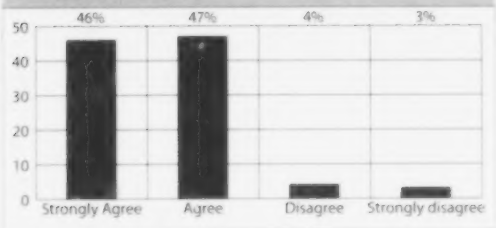

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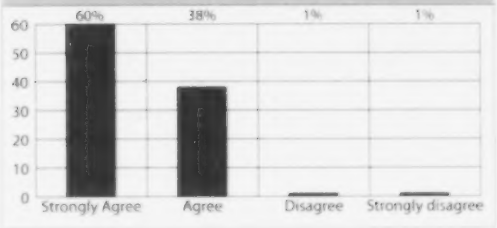

APPENDIX C5

Agreement with Possible Ways to Achieve Building Block Outcomes

BUILDING BLOCK #5: Accessing Learning Resources and Technologies for 21st Century Learners

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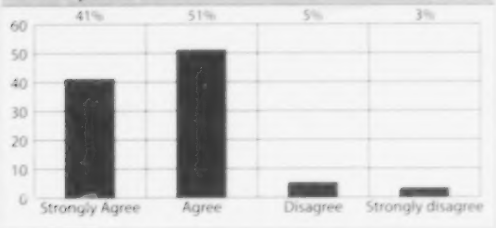

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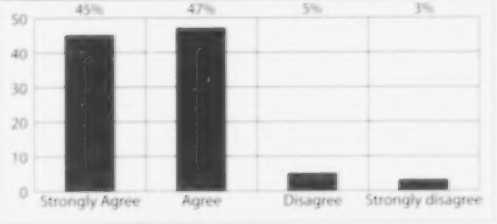

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